

Significance of *Hesed* in the Blessing of Naomi: Exegetical and Theological Study of Ruth 1:8, 9

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Abstract

The connection of hesed and covenant commitment is a pivotal point in the covenant between Ruth and Naomi. The blessing of Naomi indicates that there are two agents of hesed, namely God's hesed for the two Moabite women in the future, and the hesed of the two Moabite women for Naomi's family in the past. Naomi uses the term hesed in Ruth 1:8b without giving a specific description of God's hesed. However, the oracle in Ruth 1: 9a Naomi specifies the idea of God's hesed. Through the exegetical and theological study of the text, the words of Naomi imply that the past continual covenant faithfulness of two Moabite women to Elimelech's family as well as to God is the basis of Naomi's supplication that God should reward them hesed in the future. The theological implication is that the faithfulness of human beings to the covenant commitment assures the permanence of hesed in the covenant relationship. Moreover, faithfulness to covenant commitment stood out as being a means of how God worked out His redemptive plan to turn about the human crisis. To sum, hesed is considered as the content of the covenant, and it is the basis on which the covenant relationship will be enabled to continue.

Keywords: Commitment; Covenant; Hesed

Introduction

The direct reference of $\tau\phi\eta$, *hesed* occurs 3 times in the book of Ruth (1:8, 9; 2:20; 3:10). The morphological feature of this word in the three stated texts appears as follows, *kindness* ($\tau\phi\eta$), *his kindness* ($\iota\phi\eta$), and *your kindness* ($\sigma\phi\eta$).¹ Although this word occurs only 3 times in the story, the *hesed* motive is alluded throughout the story. It is expressed through the prayer of blessing (2:12; 4:11-12, 14), greeting (2:4), or statements of God's action (1:6, 13; 4:13, 14; 1:17; 3:13).² The oracle of v. 8 is the first occurrence of *hesed* and the only direct reference of *hesed* in Ruth chapter one. The indirect references of *hesed* in vv. 6-22 are found in the three texts namely 1:6; 1:9a; 1:16, 17. These texts denote that *hesed* alludes to God's action (1:6), in the blessing formula (1:19a), and in the covenant of commitment (1:16, 17). It is obvious that both the direct and indirect

¹Zobel, Hans-Jürgen. "τφη." *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT)*. Ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 5:45, 46.

²In the book of Ruth, the indirect reference of *hesed* is found in the following text: 2:2; 2:10; 2:13. For other allusions, see Ruth 1:6; 2:12; 3:11; 4:13, 15. Ibid.

hesed put God and Ruth as the subject or agent of *hesed* act. For instance, the *hesed* of God in vv. 6, 9 refers to His active intervention in human affairs. God's intervention, in this case, is connected with His care for Naomi as a husbandless and childless.³

The *hesed* of human being in 1:16, 17 is performed by Ruth as a Moabitess. Her covenant commitment to Naomi's family constitutes a striking example of loving and sacrificial loyalty. This commitment has encompassed Ruth's every living action in the whole story.⁴ In this case, Ruth's *hesed* is connected with her commitment to be faithful in the covenant relationship with Elimelech's family as well as with Israel's God.⁵ Bush agrees with Phyllis Tribble in the point that the radical commitment of Ruth has a parallel in the Old Testament (OT) story only with the commitment of Abraham.⁶ However, the story indicates that Ruth's commitment is striking, she breaks the bonds of culture, community, and religion as well as casting aside all concern for future security. The task of this paper is to analyze the *hesed* text in the blessing of Naomi (1:8, 9) and its affinity to the covenant commitment of Ruth as a Moabite woman in the whole book of Ruth. The analysis focuses on seven major sections, namely introduction, etymological origin of *hesed*, border line of the unit, the structure of text, literary context, analysis and interpretation, and the summary.

Etymological Origin of *Hesed*

The root *ḥsd*, *hesed* occurs as a noun more frequently than as a verb in the Old Testament.⁷ It is rendered as "be loyal" or "show one's loyalty" (cf. Ps 18:26; 2 Sam 22:26). In the *piel* form, it is rendered as "be ashamed" or "be reproached" (Prov 25:10).⁸ The positive meaning of this verb is represented by the verb *ḥsd*, "be good" or "be kind," while the negative meaning is adapted from Aramaic *ḥsd*, "be put to shame" or *ḥsd*, "reproach" or "revile." In the Targum and the Septuagint, the word "shame" or "reproach" is a translation of *ḥsd* (*piel* imperfect, cf. Prov 25:10).⁹ The root *ḥsd* as a noun, as well as an adjective, may be divided into five different derivatives forms; they are *ḥsd*, *ḥsd*, *ḥsd*, *ḥsd*, and *ḥsd*. Each word has a different meaning. For example, *ḥsd* in the nominative masculine form with its various derivative forms is mostly rendered as "goodness," "kindness," or

³The visit of God and giving of food to Israel in v. 6 focuses on God's *hesed* act in removing the famine from Israel (1: 1, 2) which is called by Waltke and Yu as *no grain seed* or *no lehem*. Waltke, Bruce K., and Charles Yu. *Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 853; cf. Hamilton, Victor P. *Handbook on the Historical Books: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, Esther* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 190.

⁴Campbell, Edward F. Jr. *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Anchor Bible 7 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 74. Hubbard, Robert L. *The Book of Ruth*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 119, 120.

⁵Tribble, Phyllis. "A Human Comedy." *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality: Overtures to Biblical Theology*. Ed. Walter Brueggemann, John R. Donahue (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1978), 173.

⁶Cf. Bush, Frederic W. *Ruth/Esther*. Word Biblical Commentary 9 (Dallas, TX: Word, 1996), 87.

⁷Zobel, 1977, 45, 46; Baer, David A., and Robert P. Gordon. "ḥsd." *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis (NIDOTTE)*. Ed. W. A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 2:210, 211. Cf. *Bible Works*, Biblical Database Software for Microsoft Windows, version 7.0.012x, (Bible Works, LLC. Hermeneutika Computer Bible Research Software. ḥsd, MT, 2007).

⁸Clines gave a specific example for *be loyal* in Hebrew text. It is found in 2 Sam 22:26 and Ps 18:26. Clines, David J. A. *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield, UK: Academic, 1998), s.v. "ḥsd."

⁹Brown, Francis, with S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (BDB). Based on the lexicon of William Gesenius (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952), s.v. "ḥsd."

“loving kindness.”¹⁰ Thus, the possible translation of these five words is as follows: רַחֵם, “kindness/loyalty,” רַחֵם, “kind/pious,” רַחֵם “stork,” רַחֵם, “Yahweh is kind,” and רַחֵם, “reproach/disgrace.” The use of *hesed* in the covenant commitment in the book of Ruth, mostly rendered as “loving kindness” or “loyalty.”

Borderline of the Unit

Ruth 1:8-9a belongs to the larger context of a dialogue between Naomi and her two daughters-in-law (vv. 8-19a). It stands in the flow of command, blessing, commitment, and accusation. The repetition of the key words שׁוּב “return” and the calamity motive in the dialogue contribute to the unity of this section. The other key word which has a semantic correspondence with שׁוּב is הֵלֵךְ, “to go” or “to travel,” and it occurs nine times in the story.¹¹

These two key words are devoted exclusively in the dialogue that takes place between the three women somewhere on the road to Judah (1:6-22).¹² They have a thematic correspondence or contrast with the idea of *hesed*. For example, the verb שׁוּב “return” in 1:6a is used by Naomi in the allusion of God’s *hesed* act “the Lord had visited His people in giving them food” (v. 6b). Accordingly, the use of the verb וָשׁוּב, “she returns” (v. 6a) and וַתֵּלֶכְהָ, “they went” (v. 7b) occur in the same positive sense, namely to depict God’s רַחֵם who reveals the hopes and expectations in the midst of bitterness and despair that surrounded Naomi’s life.

In contrast to that, the verbs שׁוּב and הֵלֵךְ in vv. 11, 12 are used by Naomi in the context of her hopelessness for the future. Naomi’s description about God totally contrasts with the idea of God’s *hesed* act in vv. 6, 7. She said “for the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me” (1:21). This is the rationale of Naomi to urge Orpah and Ruth to *return* to Moab. The use of שׁוּב and הֵלֵךְ in the oracle of Ruth 1:16 is connected to the radical commitment of Ruth. Thus, the verbs שׁוּב and הֵלֵךְ construct a positive correspondence with God’s *hesed*. In the light of this fact, it is plausible to conclude that the use of these two verbs in this section occurs in three different contexts. First, they are used in the context of God’s *hesed* in giving Israel food (1:6). Second, they are used in the context of Naomi’s negative interpretation about God’s *hesed* due to the calamities she has experienced (1:11-13, 21). Lastly, they are used in the context of Ruth’s radical commitment to join the covenant people and worship the true God (1:16, 17).

The direct reference of *hesed* occurs in the first dialogue between Naomi and two Moabite women (vv. 8, 9). The contrast parallel of Naomi’s blessing and her negative reference to God is found in two references. First, the blessing of Naomi for her two daughters-in-law (vv. 8, 9) is accompanied with invocation for God’s *hesed*. Second, Ruth’s commitment to return with Naomi (vv. 16, 17) attests her personal commitment to be a part of the covenant community. Thus, the commitment of Ruth in v. 17b, which is expressed in a self-imprecatory oath formula “if anything

¹⁰Clines, 1998, 121. Cf. Baer and Gordon, 1997, 2:79, 93, 211-218.

¹¹See Tribble, 1978, 195; cf. Rendtorff, Rolf. “The Canonical Hebrew Bible.” *Theology of the Old Testament*. Ed. David E. Orton (Leiden, Holland: Deo, 2005), 370.

¹²The story indicates that these key words occur in four dialogues of the story (vv. 6-22). The first dialogue is dominated by the speech of Naomi in urging her two daughters-in-law to return to Moab (vv. 8, 9). The second dialogue focuses on the second insistence of Naomi to urge her daughters-in-law to return to Moab. The third dialogue notes the insistence of Ruth and her radical commitment to return with Naomi (vv. 14-19a). The fourth dialogue occurs between Naomi and the women in Bethlehem (vv. 19b-22). The first three dialogues occur on the way to Bethlehem, and the fourth one occurs when Naomi and Ruth have arrived in Bethlehem. Bush, 1996, 88-89.

but death parts you and me,” suggests that she has a radical covenant faithfulness to God and to Israel.

Structure

The oracle of Ruth 1:8, 9a starts with Naomi’s command in the imperative form (v. 8a). Her farewell action, such as “she kisses them and they lifted up their voices” (v. 9b) stands as the enclosure of the command.¹³ In between, there are two consecutive blessings of Naomi. First, she grants them the *hesed* of God as they return to their mother’s house (v. 8b). Second, she asks them to find a resting place in their husband’s house (v. 9a). Between these two blessings, there is a subordinate clause which is expressed in the perfect form. This indicates that the *hesed* act of Ruth and Orpah was performed during the 10 years that they were living with Elimelech’s family. Their *hesed* act (v. 8c) stands at the turning point of the oracle. The chiasmic structure of this discourse is indicated in table 1.

This structure indicates that *the command* of Naomi in v. 8a (A) has a parallel connection with Naomi’s farewell action “kiss them” (A’). This action reinforces her insistence to urge them to return to Moab. The first blessing in v. 8b (B) has a connection to the second blessing (B’). The difference is the focus of the blessing; the former blessing focuses on invoking God’s *hesed*, and the later emphasizes is on granting מנוחה, “resting place” or “security” for Orpah and Ruth. The turning point of these two blessings is found in the *hesed* act of Orpah and Ruth for Elimelech’s family (C). Thus, the blessing in sections B and B’ is intended to reciprocate the *hesed* of Orpah and Ruth which has been performed prior to their farewell meeting (C).

It is important to note that the juxtaposition of the imperative words and benediction in this text reveals two striking points. First, it emphasizes the reciprocal sense of the relationship between Naomi and her two daughters-in-law. Second, the command and blessing underscore the subordinate status of Orpah and Ruth, in the sense that they are not part of Israel as the covenant people (vv. 4, 5). When Naomi is about to return to Bethlehem, she urges them to return to Moab. Calamity is the motive for her request to the two Moabite women. This fact incorporates her argument in v. 13, “for it is harder for me than for you” if they return with Naomi.¹⁴

Literary Context

The calamity motive is a strong emphasis on the backdrop of the whole story in Ruth chap. 1. The story of Ruth starts with a catastrophe, Naomi loses her husband and two sons and she lives with her two daughters-in-law, but both of them are apparently barren (1:1-5). The information in v.6, “she had heard in the land of Moab that the Lord had visited His people in giving them food” serves as the motive of her return to Bethlehem.¹⁵ This is a hint of the resolution of Naomi’s life,

¹³The word נשק which simply means “to kiss” is also used as a gesture of farewell in the OT (see for example, Gen 31:28; 1 Kgs 19:21).

¹⁴Holladay describes the figurative meaning of שוב in the OT theology as changing one’s mind. He argues that the meaning of this term refers to two senses, (apostasy) *turning away from God* or (repentance) *turning to God* (e.g., Deut 4:29-31; 30:1-10). This implies that this verb is mostly used, theologically or in a figurative meaning, under these two topics. Holladay, William L. *A Concise Hebrew, and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (HALOT)* (Leiden, Holland: Brill, 1971), s.v. “שוב.” Soggin, J. Alberto. “שוב.” *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Ed. Ernest Jenni, Clause Wassermann. Trans. by Mark. E. Biddle (Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 1997), 1:116-157, 362, 363. Fabry, Bonn. “שוב.” *TDOT*, 14:498, 499. Thompson, James A., and Elmer A. Martens. “שוב.” *NIDOTTE*, 4:56, 57.

¹⁵Cf. Prinsloo, Willem S. “The Theology of the Book of Ruth.” *Vetus Testamentum* 30 (1980): 332.

which is reinforced by the expression “they come to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest” (1:22).¹⁶ These expressions attest that God is faithful to His covenant promise by giving His people food to solve the problem of famine. However, Naomi at this point lacks the component of faith to perceive God’s *hesed* act through these events (cf. 1:11-13).

Naomi urges Orpah and Ruth to return to Moab, but Ruth insists on returning with her (vv. 16, 17). Naomi assumes that her emptiness and tragedy occur due to the hand of God against her (vv. 12, 13, 20, 21).¹⁷ Naomi’s presupposition is obvious, by allowing them to return with her, it creates a new problem for her. Thus, Naomi invokes God’s *hesed* with a purpose to reciprocate Orpah and Ruth’s *hesed* (1:8,9). Although Naomi’s benediction in this case asserts that she is aware of God’s providence for her daughters-in-law; however, her reason to urge Orpah and Ruth to return to Moab is due to her bitter experience in Moab (1:3-5).

In the light of this focal point of the story, the return and calamity motive stand as a dominant theme in the second scene of Ruth chap. 1 (1:6-19a), “they went on the way to return to the land of Judah” (v. 7a) and “so they both went until they came to Bethlehem” (v. 19a). In the third scene, the return motive is reemphasized: “they had come to Bethlehem” (v. 19b) and “they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest” (v. 22). The center of this section is found on the covenant of commitment of Ruth, which is contrasted with the *return* motive of Naomi in the second scene (vv. 6-19a) and the third scene (19b-22a).

In summary, Naomi’s admonition to her daughters-in-law is dominated by a calamity motive (1:8, 15b). God’s *hesed*, to Israel (1:6) is the motive of Naomi’s return to Bethlehem (1:6). The dialogue between Naomi and her daughters-in-law is dominated by the same motive (1:10-13). The presence *hesed* of God to Israel (1:6), the past *hesed* of Orpah and Ruth to Elimelech’s family (1:8a), and God’s future *hesed* for Orpah and Ruth stand as the focal point of Ruth chap. 1 (1:6-9). Ruth joined Naomi to Bethlehem is the result of her radical commitment. Paradoxically, the joyful welcoming of the women of Bethlehem (v. 21) is responded to by recounting the reason for her bitterness, “the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me” (vv. 20b, 21; cf. v. 13). Thus, the *hesed*, of God and the *hesed*, of human being in Ruth chap. 1 is mentioned in the context of Naomi’s calamity. Naomi was not yet able to perceive God’s provision through these events (1:6, 16, 17, 20).

Analysis and Interpretation

The *hesed* of God and the *hesed* of the two Moabite women in Ruth 1: 8, 9 are cited in Naomi’s prayer of blessing. The connection between these two agents of *hesed* is obvious, Naomi reciprocates the past *hesed* of Orpah and Ruth by granting them God’s *hesed*. The subordinate clause gives allusion to the past *hesed* of Orpah and Ruth, כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָם, “as you have dealt.” The particle relative כַּאֲשֶׁר suggests the agreement of their *hesed* act with God’s *hesed* act in the main clause (cf. Gen 3:5; 44:15).¹⁸ The first blessing of Naomi reveals the exemplification of the divine-human *hesed* in a reciprocal sense. The recipients of God’s *hesed* in the main clause are Orpah and Ruth, and the recipient of the two Moabite women’s *hesed* in the subordinate clause is Elimelech’s family.

¹⁶See Grant, Reg. “Literary Structure in the Book of Ruth.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148 (1991): 148, 428, 429.

¹⁷Prinsloo, 1980, 30, 33.

¹⁸Holladay, 1971, 149; Brown, 1952, 455.

The second blessing focuses on Naomi's supplication, that God enables Orpah and Ruth to find a *מנוחה*, "resting place" (1:9a). The literal context indicates that this word stands in apposition with the clause *אִשָּׁה בֵּית אִישָׁה*, "the house of her husband." However, syntactically it is impossible to perceive it as an apposition construction. Bush argues that *אִשָּׁה* is not in apposition with *מנוחה*, but it forms the subject of the verb as the distributive *each*. In most cases, it is improbable for the appositive (i.e. two nouns or elements that are juxtaposed) to be definite "the house of her husband" and the head noun indefinite, simply *מנוחה*, "resting place." Thus, Bush is right when he argues that the phrase *אִשָּׁה בֵּית אִישָׁה* must be adverbial.¹⁹ Hence, the word *בֵּית* is rendered as "house of" (cf. Num 30:4; 2 Kgs 11:4). In this view, Hubbard has specified the idea of expression *אִשָּׁה בֵּית אִישָׁה* as "a place of settled security, namely a home with her husband."²⁰

In light of the above syntactical connection, the intention of Naomi's blessing is to grant Orpah and Ruth security through marriage. The expression *יְתֵן יְהוָה* "may Yahweh grant" which is followed by the clause consisting of the connective *ו*, "and" joined with the imperative verb *וּמְצָאָהָן*. The significance of this construction is to express the intended consequence "that you may find rest."²¹ This implies that Naomi believes God who enables them to find a home and husband due to their past *hesed*.

Hesed in Ruth 1:8b

God, in the first blessing (v. 8a), stands as the subject of the clause, and the indirect object of the verb *יַעֲשֶׂה*, "made" or "dealt" is *hesed*. Orpah and Ruth in the prepositional phrase *עִמָּכֶם* stands as the recipient of God's action (cf. Gen 24:12; 1 Sam 20:14).²² The imperfect verb form *יַעֲשֶׂה* may indicate a hypothetical mood of Naomi's desire for Orpah and Ruth, that is God's *hesed* which will be demonstrated when they return to Moab.²³ On the other hand, the perfect verb form in the subordinate clause *כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתֶם*, "as you have done" recalls the *hesed* act of Orpah and Ruth for Elimelech's family during 10 years in Moab.²⁴

As indicated in the foregoing discussion, these two syntactical features occur on the consequential or reciprocal level of connection. Thus, Naomi's petition for God's *hesed* is merely grounded on the *hesed* of Orpah and Ruth in the past, as indicated in table 2. Naomi, in the main clause, explicitly mentions the *hesed* of God, but in the subordinate clause the *hesed* of Orpah and Ruth is implied, probably to avoid unnecessary repetition. The syntactical construction indicates that the relative clause, which is signified by the existence of the particle *כַּאֲשֶׁר* "like," denotes the resumption idea of *hesed* in the preceding clause, but it is left untranslated.²⁵ In this case, Orpah

¹⁹Bush, 1996, 76. Cf. Sasson, Jack Murad. *Ruth: A New Translation With a Philological Commentary and a Formalist-Folklorist Interpretation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 24.

²⁰Hubbard, 1988, 98.

²¹Cf. Campbell, Edward F. Jr. "The Hebrew Short Story: A Study of Ruth." *A Light Unto My Path*. Ed. H. Bream, R. Heim, and C. Moore (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), 66-101.

²²Cf. Brown, 1952, 455.

²³See Kautzsch, Emil. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Trans. Kautzsch Emil, A. E. Cowley, and M. Segal (Oxford, MS: Clarendon, 1990), 313-319; Waltke, Bruce K., M. O'Connor. *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 496-518. Badillos, Angel Saenz. *A History of the Hebrew Language*. Trans. John Elwolde (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 129.

²⁴For more discussion on the perfect form, see Kautzsch, 1990, 309-313. Waltke and O'Connor, 1990, 479-495.

²⁵For another example where *hesed* is clearly implied although it is not actually present in the text, see Gen 21:23. See also Waltke and O'Connor, 1990, 333-335. Clark, Gordon R. *The Word Hesed in the*

and Ruth stand as the subject of the verb **וַעֲשִׂיתָ** “as you have dealt,” and the object or recipients is “the dead and with me.” Thus, on the basis of Orpah and Ruth’s past *hesed* to the dead and Naomi, Naomi grants them with the *hesed* of God, as indicated on the table 3.

Syntactically, the connection between the first and second clause is highlighted by the conjunction **כַּאֲשֶׁר**, “as,” or “just as” which puts the second sentence in a subordinate status. The function of this conjunction is to make a comparison between the action in the main clause **וְעָשָׂה** . . . **יְהוָה** (*gal-imperfect*) and the action in the subordinate clause **וַעֲשִׂיתָ** (*gal-perfect*);²⁶ both refer to the same indirect object, namely the *hesed*.

In summary, the blessing of Naomi to invoke God’s *hesed* in Ruth 1:8b is performed on the two literal contexts. First, it is performed on the context of Naomi’s calamity due to the death of her family member. Second, it is performed in the context of God’s providence by visiting Israel. The purpose of Naomi’s blessing in this context is to reciprocate the *hesed* of Orpah and Ruth. Moreover, Naomi’s blessing indicates that there are two agents of *hesed*, namely God’s *hesed* for the two Moabite women in the future, and the *hesed* of the Moabite women for Naomi’s family in the past.²⁷ The reciprocal motive is obvious, the *hesed* of the two Moabite women refer to their past covenant faithfulness to Elimelech’s family and God’s future *hesed* two Moabite women refers to the idea of security through marriage (1:9a). Thus, God’s intervention in giving them a successful life was grounded upon their continual covenant faithfulness to the covenant relationship.²⁸

Hesed in Ruth 1:9a

Naomi said, “May the LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband” (v.9a). Naomi invokes God’s providence to grant the two Moabites women that they may **וַאֲחֶיךָ יִמְנוּחַ**, “find a resting place.” There are two syntactical problems in Naomi’s expression. First, the jussive verb **יִתֵּן**, “to grant” or “to give” is followed by the second clause consisting of the conjunction **וְ**, “and” joined to an imperative verb form **וַאֲחֶיךָ** (from **אָחַז**, “to find”).²⁹ Writers, such as Joüon and Muraoka, consider the second clause “that you may find rest” as the object of the first verb **יִתֵּן**.³⁰ E. Campbell rejects this thesis on the ground that there is no other example in the OT where the second verb occurs in the imperative form. E. Campbell agrees with Kautzsch Emil, that the jussive form in a number of passages is used with an imperative form plus the **וְ**. He argued that this form denotes the consequential idea of the oracle (e.g., Gen 20:7). Thus, the possible translation is “may God grant to you so that you may find....”³¹ It indicates that the verb **וַאֲחֶיךָ**, “find” in the first clause is left without an object. This is unusual syntax where the object of verb the **יִתֵּן**, “to grant” or “to give” would have disappeared from the whole Hebrew textual tradition. Thus, Joüon

Hebrew Bible. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 157 (Sheffield, UK: Academic, 1993), 38.

²⁶Arnold, Bill T., and John H. Choi. *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 179, 180.

²⁷Cf. Clark, 1993, 177.

²⁸Cf. Keck, Leander E. “Ruth.” *The New Interpreter’s Bible* 2 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1998), 903-904.

²⁹Bush, 1996, 76.

³⁰Joüon, Paul and Muraoka Takamitsu. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Winona Lake, In: Eisenbrauns, 1978), 73.

³¹Campbell, 1974, 39; Kautzsch, 1990, 110.

and Muraoka's perspective is a plausible solution in spite of the lack of a close parallel to the case here.³²

The second difficulty comes from the expression *בֵּית אִשָּׁה מְנוּחָה*, "resting place in the house of her husband." Some scholars contend that the clause "the house of her husband" is in apposition with the phrase *מְנוּחָה*, "resting place."³³ To judge whether this argument is true or not, it is necessary to investigate two syntactical aspects. First, *אִשָּׁה* is not in apposition with *מְנוּחָה*, instead it stands as the subject of the verb, as the distributive of the word *each*, which regularly construes with the plural verb. Second, it is improbable for the appositive to be definite *the house of her husband*, and the head noun indefinite *מְנוּחָה*. Hence, the clause *בֵּית אִשָּׁה* must be adverbial, as commentators have generally understood it to be.³⁴ In such a locative adverbial expression, the use of *בֵּית* may be rendered as either the "house of" or "in the house of" (cf. Num 30:4, 11; 2 Kgs 4:4).

In view of the above syntactical feature, the oracle of Ruth 1:9a denotes that Naomi's desire for Ruth and Orpah is to guarantee them *מְנוּחָה*, "a resting place," through God's *hesed* act. The phrase "a resting place" most probably refers to the idea of security through marriage. In Deut 12: 9 this word refers to the place where God will choose a site as dwelling for his name.³⁵ Naomi's blessing in this context constitutes a pivotal issue, namely God's *דָּוָר* makes a woman bear the sons. The subtle point of Naomi's blessing is found in the rationale of her command in Ruth 1: 11-13. It contrasts the significance of her blessing as follows:

- | | |
|------------|---|
| v.11b | Have I yet sons in my womb that they may be your husbands? |
| v.12b, 13a | I am too old to have a husband. . . . If I said I have hope. . . .
would you therefore wait until they grew? |
| v.13b | Would you therefore refrain from marrying? |
| v.13c | It is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the Lord has gone forth
against me (cf. 1:20, 21). |

Naomi's rhetorical argument suggests that it is impossible to have more sons in order to provide husbands for Orpah and Ruth (v. 11). She uses the term *תִּקְוָה* "hope" (v. 12b) in the conditional statement to suggest that if God's providence enables Naomi to have a son in that moment, Orpah and Ruth could not wait for the son because of age. Her rationale is presented as "it is harder for me and for you, for the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me" (v. 13). This expression suggests that there is no *תִּקְוָה* for Orpah and Ruth if they return with Naomi due to God's

³²Joüon and Muraoka, 1978, 78-53. Cf. Hubbard, 1988, 98.

³³See Block, Daniel I. *Judges, Ruth*. The New American Commentary 6 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 632. Campbell, 1974, 64; Buttrick, George Arthur. "Ruth." *The Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1953), 2: 835, 836. Farmer, Kathleen A. Robertson. "The Book of Ruth." *The New Interpreter's Bible*. Ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1998), 2: 903, 904; Meyers, Jacob M. "Returning Home: Ruth 1:8 and Gendering of the Book of Ruth." *Naomi and Ruth: A Feminist Companion to Ruth*. Ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield, UK: Academic, 1993), 99-114.

³⁴Sasson, 1979, 24.

³⁵The idea of a *מְנוּחָה*, "resting place" has two examples in the OT which refers to the place where the locusts exist (Exod 10:4) and the spirit of God comes upon Israel (Num 10:36; cf. Josh 3:13; Isa 25:10). Cf. McComiskey, Thomas Edward. *The Covenants of Promise: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Grand Rapids: MI: Baker, 1985), 43. See also Oswalt, John N. "נִדְוֶה." *NIDOTE*, 3:57, 58. More specifically McComiskey indicates that the phrase "resting place" is connected to *covenant promise* in the book of Deuteronomy. McComiskey, 1985, 42, 43.

punishment upon her. The only possible way to reciprocate their past *hesed*, was to ensure their *security* by invoking God's *hesed*.

In summary, the purpose of Naomi's blessing is that Orpah and Ruth have future security through marriage without using the word *hesed*. In v.8b Naomi uses the term רַחֵם without giving a specific description of God's *hesed*. Hence, the oracle of v. 9a specifies the idea of God's *hesed*, that is God's action to provide security for Orpah and Ruth in the future. The meaning of רַחֵם, "resting place" in Naomi's blessing refers to the idea of marriage. Naomi's blessing for Orpah and Ruth in this context is grounded on their past covenant faithfulness (*hesed*) to Elimelech's family as well as to Israel's God. However, the fulfillment of Naomi's hope for Orpah and Ruth depend on the *hesed* act of God. At this point, both God and the women are faithful to the covenant relationship.

Ruth's Hesed in the Immediate Context

The expression "as you have done with the dead and with me" (1:8b) does not specify the content of the *hesed* of Orpah and Ruth. There are two expressions in the immediate context to materialize another *hesed* of Ruth to Naomi. First, it is found in the radical commitment of Ruth in 1:16, 17. This commitment is performed in the middle of two lamentations of Naomi (vv. 12, 13 and vv. 20, 21). Ruth includes the name of God which has been mentioned in Naomi's petition in 1: 6, 8, 9. This commitment denotes Ruth's covenant faithfulness to be a part of the covenant people, and to worship the true God of Israel.³⁶ Ruth 1:16, 17 says,

Ruth said to Naomi, 'Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me.'³⁷

This pericope starts with imperative words, and is then followed by two parallel commitments of Ruth to *go* and to *lodge* wherever Naomi will *go* and *lodge* (v. 6b). This expression has a parallel correspondence in form and content with the expression "wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried" (v. 17a). In form, they are verbal clauses, and in content, they encompass all of life: הָלַךְ, "go," לֵין, "stay," מוֹת, "die," and קָבַר, "bury." This implies that whatever the activity of Naomi will engage in, so will Ruth also, even if it will end in death.

The focal point of this commitment is found in two nominal clauses "your people shall be my people, and your God, my God" (1:16c). Thus, Ruth's radical commitment implicitly suggests that the purpose of her insistence to *return* to Judah is to centralize the crucial issue of life, namely to join the covenant people, to be faithful to God's covenant, and worship Him as the true God. This is the only way that Ruth can see to construct the new paradigm of life after the tragedy of famine and the death that afflict Ruth and Naomi.

Ruth's radical commitment in this text is to respond to Naomi's command in v. 15, "your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister." The expression "your people and your God" (v. 16) are used in order to contrast *her people* and *her gods* (v.15).

³⁶Hubbard, 1988, 88. For more discussion on the commitment of Ruth, see Waard, Jan De, and E. A. Nida. *A Translator's Handbook on the Book of Ruth* (London, UK: United Bible Societies, 1973), 17.

³⁷For the structure of the discourse of 1:16, 17, see Bush, 1996, 74 and Block, 1999, 640.

Jewish tradition considers Ruth's commitment as an expression of conversion,³⁸ Some scholars view the significance of this expression from the element of the discourse, for instance, Sasson notes that "it is not only the act of worshiping, but also alludes to all the deeds and acts which cement a bond between individuals and their deities."³⁹

The striking argument concerning the commitment of Ruth presented by scholars, such as Larkin and LaCocque, is based on the theological focus of the book. They contend that the theme of *hesed* is connected to the lofty concept of covenant. Thus, the words of Ruth in 1:16, 17 are considered to be an expression of *covenant fidelity*.⁴⁰ At this point, E. Campbell conceptualizes the idea of covenant into contact with day-to-day life.⁴¹ Ruth's commitment in 1:16, 17 attest the covenant fidelity to change her original status of nationality and religion to Israel as a covenant community and to worship a true God.⁴² Regarding this point, E. Campbell is right. However he has overlooked the fact that *hesed* is the content of covenant relationship. Thus, *hesed* in this view is considered the human faithfulness to their covenant relationship with God. Human being (i.e., Ruth and Boaz) needed to be faithful to God's covenant.

The expressions *my people* and *my God* or *your people* and *your God* have a thematic connection with the discourse of Ruth 1:6. The phrases *the Lord* and *his people* in the clause "the Lord has visited his people" (1:6) serve as a high point of Ruth 1:16, 17. These expressions are considered to be a type of relationship term that expresses a treatise and covenant relationship.⁴³ The subject of the verb פָּקַד, "to visit" is God (v. 6), it denotes that the calamities are redeemable, and God restores the covenant between Israel and God. Thus, the covenant commitment of Ruth (1:16, 17) and God's visitation to Israel and giving them food (1:6) are the *hesed* motive to solve the problem of Naomi and Israel.⁴⁴

³⁸Campbell, 1974, 80; Nielsen, Kirsten. *Ruth: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1997), 49.

³⁹Sasson, 1979, 29. For more discussion on this topic, see Mathew, Victor H. *Judges and Ruth*. New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 222.

⁴⁰Larkin, Katrina J. A. *Ruth and Esther*. Old Testament Guide (Sheffield, UK: Academic, 1996) 50-51. Lacocque, André. *Ruth*, A Continental Commentary (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2004), 52-54. Campbell, 1974, 73.

⁴¹E. Campbell, 1974, 80; LaCocque, 2004, 52-54; Exum, J. Cheryl. *Plotted, Shot, and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women*. JSOTSup 215 (Sheffield, UK: Academic, 1996), 137.

⁴²The word *covenant* (בְּרִית) or its synonym does not appear in Ruth 1:16, 17 and in the whole book of Ruth. However, it is wrong to suppose that the only way the oracle can be present is if the word is present. There are examples in the OT where the word *covenant* is not mentioned, but it implies the idea of covenant treaty. Read Ps 89:3, 28, 34, 39. In my judgment this is precisely analogous to what is in Ruth 1:16, 17. Although there is no ratification ceremony accompanying these covenants, the commitment consists of the notion *covenant* (cf. Gen 2:15-17). See Collins, C. John. *Genesis 1-4: Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (New Jersey, NJ: P & R, 2006), 112, 113.

⁴³For more similar expressions in Ruth 1:16 see 1 Kgs 22:4 and 2 Kgs 3:7. Cogan, Mordechai, and Hayim Tadmor. *II Kings: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1988), 44. Kutler, L. "A Structural Semantic Approach to Israelite Communal Terminology." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 14 (1982): 71-72.

⁴⁴In the broader context, the covenant commitment of Ruth in vv. 16, 17, in a certain point, is parallel with the covenant made between David and Abner (2 Sam 3:12, 13), Rahab and Joshua's scouts (Josh 2:12-14). Knoppers, Gary N. "Ancient Near Eastern Royal Grants and the Davidic Covenant." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116 (1996): 670-697. Lapsley, Jacqueline E. "Feeling Our Way: Love for God in Deuteronomy." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly (CBQ)* 65 (2003): 350-369; 201-218. Cf. Moran, William L. "The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy." *CBQ* 25 (1963): 77-87;

Ruth 2:11 is the second text that alludes to Ruth's *תָּנָה* which is not implied in the blessing of Naomi in Ruth 1:8. Boaz recounts what Ruth has done for Elimelech's family in his retrospective information. Ruth 2:11 reads, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband has been fully reported to me, and how you left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and came to a people that you did not previously know."

The expression in the first clause "all that you have done" has a thematic affinity with the clause in the blessing of Naomi, "as you have done with the death and with me" (1: 8c). The former clause refers to the *hesed* act of Ruth, and it is a reiteration of Ruth's *hesed* in 1:8c. This connection suggests that the thematic affinity in these two expressions refers to the *hesed* of Ruth. Moreover, the expression "how you left your father and your mother and the land of your birth" (2:11a) echoes Ruth's pledge in 1:16. It follows with the second expression to emphasize the covenant notion of knowledge.⁴⁵ Fensham and others argue that the idiomatic meaning of the verb יָדַע, "to know" in the expression "you came to a people that you did not previously know" (2:11b) at the level of family relationship connotes the covenantal recognition across the family lines.⁴⁶ In favor of this argument, Tikva Frymer-Kensky characterizes the words of Ruth's speech as the "cadence of covenant and contract."⁴⁷ Thus, the oracle of Boaz in 2:11b echoes the whole idea of the radical commitment of Ruth in 1:16.

Summary and Conclusion

God's *hesed* and human *hesed* in the blessing of Naomi have two contrasting contexts. First, there is a double catastrophe, namely the famine and the death of a beloved one (1:1-5), and Naomi's negative interpretation about God's character regarding these catastrophes (see 1:11, 13, 20, 21). Second, the allusion of God's *hesed* through the expression "the Lord had visited his people in giving them food" (1:6) stand out as being the reason for Naomi's return to Judah. There is also an allusion to human *hesed* through Ruth's radical commitment. She insisted on being a part of the covenant community where she worshipped the true God (1:16, 17).

The blessing of Naomi in this two context is expressed in the fact that God should bestow *hesed* on Orpah and Ruth in the same way in the future (1:9a) as they had rendered it to the deceased ones and to Naomi in the past (1:8a). In the light of this point, God's *hesed* refers to granting the Moabite women a מְנוּחָה, "resting place" or "protection" through marriage. Human *hesed* most probably refers to the faithfulness of the two Moabite women in the covenant relationship with Elimelech's family. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that the faithfulness (*hesed*) of the two Moabite women in the covenant relationship is the basis of Naomi's supplication that God should reward them *hesed* in the future.

Cohen, Ada Taggar. "Political Loyalty in the Biblical Account of 1 Samuel xx-xxii in the Light of Hittite Texts," *Vetus Testamentum* 55 (2005): 251-268. Campbell, 1974, 120.

⁴⁵Smith, Mark S. "Your People Shall be My People: Family and Covenant in Ruth 1:16-17." *CBQ* 69 (2007): 246.

⁴⁶Fensham, Charles. "The Treaty Between Israel and the Gibeonites." *Biblical Archaeologist* 27 (1964): 96-100; Kalluveetil, Paul. *Declaration and Covenant: A Comprehensive Review of Covenant Formulae From the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East* (Rome, Italy: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1982), 84.

⁴⁷Kensky, Tikva Frymer. *Reading the Women of the Bible: A New Interpretation of Their Stories* (New York, NY: n.p., 2002), 241.

Conclusion. The implication is obvious, that Ruth's covenant commitment stood out as being a means of how God worked out His redemptive plan to turn about Naomi's crisis. For Naomi's crisis to change into becoming her hope depended on the *hesed* of God. In this context, human faithfulness (i.e., Ruth) assures the permanence of *hesed* in the covenant relationship. It means that *hesed* is considered to be the content of the covenant and the basis on which the covenant relationship will be enabled to continue.